

NATO

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), also called the North Atlantic Alliance, is an intergovernmental military alliance between 29 North American and European countries. The organization implements the North Atlantic Treaty that was signed on 4 April 1949. NATO constitutes a system of collective defense whereby its independent member states agree to mutual defense in response to an attack by any external party. NATO's Headquarters are located in Haren, Brussels, Belgium, while the headquarters of Allied Command Operations is near Mons, Belgium.



Since its founding, the admission of new member states has increased the alliance from the original 12 countries to 29. The most recent member state to be added to NATO is Montenegro on 5 June 2017. NATO currently recognizes Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, North Macedonia and Ukraine as aspiring members. An additional 21 countries participate in NATO's Partnership for Peace program, with 15 other countries involved in institutionalized dialogue programs. The combined military spending of all NATO members constitutes over 70% of the global total. Members have committed to reach or maintain defense spending of at least 2% of GDP by 2024.



On 4 March 1947, the Treaty of Dunkirk was signed by France and the United Kingdom as a Treaty of Alliance and Mutual Assistance in the event of a possible attack by Germany or the Soviet Union in the aftermath of World War II. In 1948, this alliance was expanded to include the Benelux countries, in the form of the Western Union, also referred to as the Brussels Treaty Organization (BTO), established by the Treaty of Brussels. Talks for a new military alliance which could also include North America resulted in the signature of the North Atlantic Treaty on 4 April 1949 by the member states of the Western Union plus the United States, Canada, Portugal, Italy, Norway, Denmark and Iceland.

The North Atlantic Treaty was largely dormant until the Korean War initiated the establishment of NATO to implement it, by means of an integrated military structure: This included the formation of Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in 1951, which adopted the Western Union's military structures and plans. In 1952, the post of Secretary General of NATO was established as the organization's chief civilian, the first major NATO maritime exercises began; Exercise Mainbrace, and Greece and Turkey acceded. In 1955, West Germany was also incorporated into NATO, which resulted in the creation of the Soviet-dominated Warsaw Pact, delineating the two opposing sides of the Cold War.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in Germany in 1989, the organization conducted its first military interventions in Bosnia from 1992 to 1995 and later Yugoslavia in 1999 during the breakup of Yugoslavia. Politically, the organization sought better relations with former Warsaw Pact countries, most of which joined the alliance in 1999 and 2004. Article 5 of the North Atlantic treaty, requiring member states to come to the aid of any member state subject to an armed attack, was invoked for the first and only time after the September 11 attacks, after which troops were deployed to Afghanistan under the NATO-led ISAF. The organization has operated a range of additional roles since then, including sending trainers to Iraq, assisting in counter-piracy operations and in 2011 enforcing a no-fly zone over Libya in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1973. The less potent Article 4, which merely invokes consultation among NATO members, has been invoked five times following incidents in the Iraq War, Syrian Civil War, and annexation of Crimea.

The Russian intervention in Crimea in 2014 led to strong condemnation by NATO nations and the creation of a new "spearhead" force of 5,000 troops at bases in Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria. At the subsequent 2014 Wales summit, the leaders of NATO's member states formally committed for the first time spend the equivalent of at least 2% of their gross domestic products on defense by 2024, which had previously been only an informal guideline.

During the Libyan Civil War, violence between protestors and the Libyan government under Colonel Muammar Gaddafi led to the passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973, which called for a ceasefire, and authorized military action to protect civilians. A coalition that included several NATO members began enforcing a no-fly zone over Libya shortly afterwards, beginning with Opération Harmattan by the French Air Force on March 19.

By the end of the mission in October 2011, after the death of Colonel Gaddafi, NATO planes had flown about 9,500 strike sorties against pro-Gaddafi targets. A report from the organization Human Rights Watch in May 2012 identified at least 72 civilians killed in the campaign. Following a coup d'état attempt in October 2013, Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zeidan requested technical advice and trainers from NATO to assist with ongoing security issues. [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO>]

